

CHEMICAL PEELS

how deep can you go?

In general, many people are unaware of what a chemical peel is and what it does for the skin. To some people, for the most part, it sounds scary but the results are awesome. Chemical peels are a terrific way to treat different skin issues. Combined with other treatments, such as lasers, Botox or fillers the results are amazing! Let me educate you on the value of a good chemical peel.

INTRODUCTION

The development of chemical peels and other resurfacing technologies emerged with the general public's increased interest in the appearance of their skin and the desire for a youthful look and the correction of sun-damaged skin. In today's market several types of chemical peels are used for different conditions such as acne, wrinkles, dark spots, skin smoothing, sun damage and enlarged pores. Patients may have tried a number of "do it yourself" over-the-counter home treatments and by the time they consult a dermatologist, they are ready for a more definitive procedure such as a chemical peel or laser treatment. New technology has been developed that has built upon the peels of the past. The use of chemical peels has been changed as newer technology such as lasers, skin tightening devices and intense pulsed light devices have entered the market and can do what some physicians used to do with peels, but more elegantly and safely. So, what types of peels are in use and how are they used in conjunction with the new devices? What can you expect as far as recovery time and final results? In the sections below, I will address these questions.

Chemical peels regardless of their "proprietary" new name are generally divided into three groups; superficial, medium-depth and deep based. They are divided into these categories based on how far they penetrate into the skin. A lot of clinical research has been done on their use, safety and efficacy of these peels and dermatologists as a whole are very familiar with them, whether they use them in practice or not. Your dermatologist should be very familiar with the types of chemical peels that he or she uses with respect to their formulation as well as the safety and efficacy studies associated with them.

The approach to chemical peel treatments as with many other cosmetic treatments has gone beyond a simple one-stage procedure to a multi-stage process involving pre-peel preparation, the peel itself and post-peel treatment with professional topical products (cosmeceuticals).

SUPERFICIAL CHEMICAL PEELS

Superficial chemical peels penetrate only the top layers of the skin and are usually performed in a series of 5-7 peeling procedures on a weekly or every-other-week basis. They can generally be used in all skin types and colors with proper pre-peel preparation and post-peel treatment. Uses for these peels include skin smoothing, treatment of mild sun damage, dark spots, mild acne or mild dryness of the skin. Preparation for the peel should include sun protection, a topical Vitamin A product such as tretinoin (Retin A) or retinol and possibly a glycolic acid as well. Your dermatologist may prescribe a topical skin lightening agent before and after the peel if you are dark-skinned or have a lot of patchy dark spots on the face. When you arrive for your peel, your face should be clean and free of make-up. The skin care therapist will then cleanse your face with a special cleanser designed to remove any residual skin oils or products for even and best penetration of the peel. During this type of peel, you should experience a slight to moderate stinging sensation that may last for the duration of the peel (3-5 minutes) and can be relieved by the use of a small fan to blow air over the treated area. Patients generally tolerate the procedure well and have no need for pain control beyond what is mentioned above. After the peel, the skin may be slightly pink and more prone to sunburn so strict sun protection including a broad-spectrum sunscreen should be used as well as the regimen prescribed by

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your dermatologist. Sometimes the skin peels for a few days, but this is not necessary for the peel to have worked properly. You may expect to have smoother skin, reduced dark spots, less sun damage and/or reduced acne break-outs. There are various ingredients used in superficial peels such as glycolic acid, salicylic acid, mandelic acid, and lactic acid. How well they work depends on proper peel selection for your skin type as well as proper preparation and application of the peel. Complications resulting from the use of superficial peels are rare and may include undesired skin color change and the extremely remote chance of a scar.

MEDIUM-DEPTH CHEMICAL PEELS

Medium depth chemical peels are designed to penetrate into the middle layers of the skin and are more effective at reducing dark patches and sun spots that may lie deeper in the skin or for more severely sun damaged skin. Chemicals such as trichloroacetic acid 35%, glycolic acids up to 70% are used in combination with compounds such as Jessner's solution to achieve the desired depth of penetration. Patients who have visible, but not deep wrinkles are better candidates for a medium-depth peel than a superficial peel. As for superficial peels, most skin types can be treated, but the risk of an adverse skin color change goes up with the depth of the peel. Fairer-skinned patients usually have fewer problems with medium-depth peels than do dark-skinned patients. Skin preparation and post-peel treatment is very similar, if not the same as for a superficial peel, although more powerful products may be prescribed or suggested. A topical to occlude and keep the skin greasy such as Vaseline or Aquaphor may be suggested for a few days after the peel depending on the peel used. Different from a superficial peel, medium depth-peels have some recovery time that is usually in the range of 4-7 days. Patients usually will experience more of a burning sensation during the peel, so your dermatologist usually will prescribe a mild sedative and/or an anxiety relieving medication just before the peel as well as a non-steroidal medication such as Ibuprofen for 24 hours after the peel to reduce inflammation. Antiviral medication to prevent an outbreak of cold sores whether or not

you can remember ever having one will usually be prescribed as a precaution. Pain is usually not felt after the peel treatment but you may expect to have redness of the treated area, some swelling and you can expect the skin to peel (desquamate) during days 2-5 after the peel. Sometimes, swelling around the eyes is more profound, but this clears after a few days. By day 7, the new skin is revealed and the skin continues to heal for the next 3-6 months with improved appearance. Complications which may result include undesired skin color change, infection and very rarely scarring.

DEEP CHEMICAL PEELS

Deep chemical peels are designed to penetrate into the mid to deep layers of the skin, but not so deep as to produce scarring, although this side effect is a remote possibility. Patients with the most severe sun damage including deep facial lines and wrinkles may be

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candidates for a deep chemical peel. Deep chemical peels have fallen out of favor with most practitioners because they are labor-intensive procedures that require specific experience to perform. Newer techniques involving laser resurfacing, intense pulsed light treatments and light-based therapies have supplanted deep peels due to their similar results and increased safety profiles. Patients undergoing deep chemical peels are usually sedated for pain and monitored as if they were undergoing an outpatient surgical procedure such as a colonoscopy. The patient undergoing a deep chemical peel recognizes the increased risk of side effects and that recovery may take two weeks or more. After care of a deep peel will include occlusive topicals and vinegar water soaks to remove the sloughing skin. There is the possibility of persistent redness or pinkness that may last 3-6 months or more after the peel. There is a chance of delayed wound healing meaning the skin does not heal properly after the peel. Other side effects include, but are not limited to infection, bleeding, scarring and skin color change. An experienced dermatologist will recognize any side effects early and will be able to take swift steps to prevent them from becoming a permanent problem. When performed by an experienced practitioner, deep chemical peels can correct severe sun damage, deep lines around the mouth, eyes and forehead and result in significant improvements in skin texture and color.

CONCLUSION

In closing, superficial, medium-depth and deep chemical peels are all options that you may discuss with your dermatologist for the treatment of various skin conditions. Results and side effects and should be performed by an experienced practitioner who is comfortable with the peeling agents used, the techniques of the various peels and how to recognize and treat any unwanted effects that may occur. Peels can be a fun way to introduce your self to skin rejuvenating treatments. They can give your skin a healthy glow, feel good afterwards and be a great addition to a complete skin care and treatment plan designed by your board-certified dermatologist...and you!



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